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ABSTRACT

This guide helps teachers enhance their classroom celebrations of Black History Month. The guide cites content-rich programs available from the Odyssey Television Network. The curricula provide enrichment for classroom expeditions into heritage and culture and bring life to language arts, literature, history, and the social sciences. As a springboard to discussion and writing assignments, the programs help students delve into the past, examine the current realities, and investigate the values and key relationships of the African-American experience. The guide provides student educational objectives, and for each program, there are discussion questions, a synopsis, and a list of resources. A professional development section includes general resources in black history, books, and Web sites. (BT)

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Celebrate Black History Month with Odyssey. A Guide for Educators.

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KIDSNET, Washington, DC.

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Programming Celebrating Black History Month

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A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers in grades three through five! Here is a way to enhance your celebrations of Black History Month 2000. Programs highlighted in this guide air on the Odyssey Network during February. Used collectively or individually, they will enrich your curriculum by giving meaning to classroom expeditions into heritage and culture. Brimming with award-winning talent, these content-rich programs bring life to language arts, literature, history and the social sciences. As a springboard to discussion and writing assignments, these programs can help your students look into the past, examine the current realities, and investigate the values and key relationships of the African-American experience.

Please check local listings, and choose programs and ideas that best suit your group. With a little advanced planning, schools may record each of these dramas, catalog them in a tape lending library, and loan them to teachers for classroom use. These programs are not limited to use during Black History Month. Odyssey Network's off-air taping rights encourage year-long teaching whether you are delving into diversity or probing core curriculum subjects. Taping rights are found at the end of this guide.

Note to educators: Some programs referenced in this guide contain violent scenes and strong language that are used to depict historical events and action of the time period. We strongly recommend that you preview the programs before showing them to students.

OBJECTIVES

After viewing the programs and participating in the activities and questions in this guide, students will be able to:

- Use the genre of drama, that is based on books and original scripts for television, in order to foster an inclusive learning environment.
- Challenge stereotypes and dispel myths about African Americans and heroes of color.
- Depict the diversity that exists within a single cultural group.
- Examine ways of confronting the injustice of racism and its violence.

FAST FACTS

Historian Carter G. Woodson, who founded the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History, started Negro History Week in 1926. That observance evolved into Black History Month. Woodson, a Harvard Ph.D., hoped that through a special observance of heritage all Americans would develop respect for one another's ethnic roots and backgrounds. Woodson, known as the father of Black History in America, so respected Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln that he chose the month in which they were born, February, as the key month for heritage celebrations.

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three gems from odyssey

"words by heart"

Family Weekend Movie based on the book by the same name by Ouida Sebestyen.
Airdate: February 20, 2000, 5-7 p.m., ET/PT
Additional airdate: February 19, midnight-2 a.m., ET/PT
Running Time: 106 minutes
Video available wherever videotapes are sold or at www.odysseychannel.com.

SYNOPSIS

When the Sills family returns home and finds a knife sticking in the family's bread and their dog murdered, they realize that someone in their all-white town desperately resents young Lena's success as winner of a Bible-quoting contest. It is one more sign that the townsfolk who have been so cordial may not accept a black family in their town.

Lena is a bright and spirited twelve-year-old whose father, Ben, teaches her to "love thy neighbor" and to practice Christian ethics, particularly forgiveness. Memorizing Bible verses "by heart" comes easily to Lena, but her father urges her to also live by those words, even in the face of adversity.

To feed his family, Ben works for Ms. Chism, a wealthy but cranky widow. Ben's wife, Claudie, and Lena work for her, too. When Lena secretly borrows a book from Ms. Chism and accidentally ruins it, Ben offers to repair fence posts to pay off the debt. This arrangement infuriates the Haineys, a family of poor white sharecroppers who poorly performed that job in past years and expect to be rehired. As Ben works alone in the fields, young Tater Hainey shoots and kills Ben and seriously injures himself. Sensing that something is wrong, Lena finds her fatally wounded father. They say their goodbyes to each other but not before the dying father reminds Lena that she must save Tater if she is going to live by the Christian values he has taught her. Lena thus faces the toughest decision of her life. "Words by Heart," set around 1910, is the compelling story of the difficult choices a young girl must make in the face of tragic personal loss and racial prejudice.

Rating TVPG-L: Please note that this program includes strong language and racial slurs used to depict racism.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Why are the Sills unique in town? In what ways are they like other respected members of the community? Why would townspeople have mixed feelings about them? Under what circumstances would the Sills family be acceptable to everyone?
- Caring, courageous and persevering people often are considered heroes. Identify heroes in this drama. Can you name other heroes who have different characteristics? Can people of all races, gender, age, religion and ability be heroes?
- Why were the teachings of the Bible important to this story? Was Lena's father correct when he asked her to save Tater? What would you have done if you were in Lena's place? Decide whether this family had other sources of strength and emotional support in addition to their Bible.

RESOURCES

Johnson, Venice. Heart Full of Grace. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995.
Lawrence, Jacob. The Great Migration: An American Story. New York: HarperTrophy, 1995.
Taylor, Mildred. The Well: David's Story. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995.

Books by Ouida Sebestyen:
Words by Heart. New York: Bantam, 1996.
Out of Nowhere: A Novel. New York: Orchard Books, 1994.
The Girl in the Box. New York: Bantam, 1989.

other programs of note from odyssey

Like "The Resting Place," based on an original script by Walter Halsey Davis, other Odyssey Network programs are produced especially for television and can help teachers celebrate heritage and culture during Black History Month 2000. The following two programs are particularly appropriate for elementary school viewing.

"in his father's shoes"

Written by Gary Gelt
Airdate: February 19, 2000, 1-3 p.m., ET/PT
Additional Airdates: February 22, 9-11 p.m., ET/PT and February 23, 2-4 p.m., ET/PT
Rating: TVG
Running Time: 2 hours
Video available wherever videotapes are sold or at www.odysseychannel.com.

Clay, an upscale suburban African-American teenager of the 1990s, fulfills his dying father's last wish to heal family wounds. Using a pair of magic shoes given to him and his father by a mysterious gypsy woman, Clay travels back in time. He morphs into his father during the father's teenage years in the 1960s. On this journey of discovery, Clay gains insight into his father's childhood. These personal experiences deepen Clay's connections with his departed father and others in his immediate family. As Clay comes to terms with his roots, he better understands himself and is able to deal with his loss. "In His Father's Shoes" is a whimsical story of how one boy learns about his heritage and, by doing so, is able to determine which things in life are truly important.

"the sweetest gift"

Written by Rosa Jordan
Airdate: February 19, 2000, 8-10 p.m., ET/PT
Additional Airdates: February 21, 2-4 p.m., ET/PT; February 25, 9-11 p.m., ET/PT; and February 26, 1-3 p.m., ET/PT
Rating: TVG
Running Time: 90 minutes
Video available wherever videotapes are sold or at www.odysseychannel.com.

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"Race to Freedom: The Underground Railroad"

Odyssey Big Screen/Odyssey Matinee television movie based on the books *Underground to Canada* and *Runaway to Freedom: The Underground Railroad* by Barbara Smucker.
Airdate: February 13, 2000, 5-7 p.m., ET/PT
Additional Airdates: February 21, 9-11 p.m., ET/PT and February 22, 2-4 p.m., ET/PT
Running Time: 94 minutes
Video available wherever videotapes are sold or at www.odysseychannel.com.

SYNOPSIS

Once President Fillmore's Fugitive Slave Act is enacted by Congress, runaway slaves, including those found in free states, can be captured and tried. This law pushes the stakes higher for slave-catching bounty hunters and multiplies the risk to runaway slaves and those who help them.

In search of freedom, two young couples plan to escape from a callous plantation owner (who is called "the Colonel" in the production). Dr. Ross, a Canadian abolitionist who was visiting the Colonel under false pretenses, offers to help them get away. Dr. Ross is actually an inexperienced "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, a network of black and white men and women who take great personal risks in order to help runaway slaves. These committed volunteers chart routes, establish safe houses, and transport fleeing slaves through woods, fields and rivers to waiting owners of boats and ships or to others who can direct them to Canada and their freedom.

Before the couples make their getaway, Dr. Ross is unexpectedly jailed. Now totally on their own, the couples have only a code word to help them identify their sympathizers. Their escape is harrowing. One of the men dies from a gunshot wound inflicted by a ruthless black bounty hunter. The bounty hunter is actually a slave trying to win his freedom from his owner. The other man, Thomas, is captured and taken away. Minnie, the clever and determined woman who inspired the escape, dies from a snakebite.

Sarah, the Colonel's favorite, now alone must face vicious bounty hunters, harsh weather and other dangers. With help from Harriet Tubman, a fearless black "conductor," and the Quaker Levi Coffin, Sarah makes her way to Canada. Dr. Ross, now out of jail, buys Thomas at a slave market and tries to make good on his original offer to help Thomas find freedom. Separately, Thomas and Sarah arrive in Canada with help from the Underground Railroad; and they are reunited. The couple can barely believe that they are free to begin a new life together when the same ruthless bounty hunters show up—armed and dangerous. "Race to Freedom: The Underground Railroad" is a harrowing story of flight that reveals the resourcefulness, intelligence and personal strengths of slaves who take extraordinary steps to escape from slavery.

Rating: TVPG-V: Note that this production contains scenes depicting violence, allusions to violence, and derogatory name-calling, all of which are deemed integral to the story.

Two families of different races, the Martins (who are white) and the Wilsons (who are black), struggle with poverty, prejudice and absent fathers. When the Wilsons' prize-winning goat, Billy, impregnates the Martins' goat, Sugar, the two families get to know each other and soon share a friendship of mutual trust and giving. When the Wilsons' oldest son, Booker, returns home for Thanksgiving dinner, he inspires them to start a new business. He encourages all to set high goals and to work toward them. Led by Booker's own achievements despite a physical disability, the two families join efforts to overcome racial prejudice in their small Florida town, and together they strive to become successful. When Booker returns at Christmas, there is a joyous celebration. Not only are there three healthy baby goats, but there are also strong bonds of friendship between the two families. "The Sweetest Gift" shows that although family backgrounds and cultures might seem worlds away, families actually are more alike than they are different.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Why were famous people from history such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Levi Coffin written into this drama? In real life, what motivated them to be involved in such dangerous work? Were others who are not so famous also involved in the same work? Are all of them worthy of being called heroes?
- How did the "Underground Railroad" get its name if it was not located under the ground and if it was not in fact a railroad? Tell why you agree or disagree that the Underground Railroad was a form of protest against slavery.
- Why weren't laws passed at the time this story took place that would have done away with slavery for good? What changed this nation from one that supported slavery to one that ended it?
- Did slavery give people incorrect ideas about people of color? Do any of those ideas exist today? Do you think that TV dramas, movies, books, oral histories, the World Wide Web and historic preservation sites can help us understand what it was like to be a slave in search of freedom? Why is it valuable to study a topic using more than one resource?

RESOURCES

Levine, Ellen. If You Traveled on the Underground Railroad. New York: Scholastic Trade, 1993.
Lyons, Mary E. Letters of a Slave Girl. New York: Aladdin Books, 1996.
Myers, Walter Dean. Now Is Your Time! The African American Struggle for Freedom. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
Schroeder, Alan. Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman. New York: Dial Books, 1996.

Books by Barbara Smucker on which this film was based:
Underground to Canada. New York: Puffin Books, 1978. (Canadian version.)
Runaway to Freedom: The Underground Railroad. New York: Lectorum Publishers, 1996.

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"Resting Place"

Hallmark Hall of Fame movie written for TV
by Walter Halsey Davis.
Airdate: February 24, 2000, 9-11 p.m., ET/PT
Additional Airdate: February 25, 2-4 p.m., ET/PT
Running Time: 97 minutes
Video available wherever videotapes are sold or at
www.odysseychannel.com.

SYNOPSIS

When he is assigned to take home the body of Second Lieutenant Dwight Johnson, an African-American Vietnam war hero, U.S. Army Major Kendall Laird naively believes that his biggest problem in this small town in Georgia will be comforting the family. Instead, he encounters mounting racial tension when a group of townspeople refuse to allow Johnson, a West Point graduate, to be buried in an all-white cemetery located in town. Dwight's parents had bought his burial plot from a compassionate woman, Eudora McAllister. Her actions so rile certain community members that they buy the cemetery and make it private in order to prevent anyone of color from resting there.

When Major Laird asks Dwight's parents to consider a federal cemetery with full military honors, they insist that he be buried in town with all the other soldiers from the community who brought honor to their country. Even direct expressions of prejudice from community leaders cannot persuade the Johnsons to back off and accept the segregated cemetery.

As Major Laird searches for an equitable solution, he uncovers a mystery. Even though the men serving under LT Johnson nominated him for a medal of honor, they are secretive and uncomfortable about Johnson's death. Could they in some way have been responsible? "The Resting Place" is a gripping story of how one African-American family confronts prejudice in life and death. It also explores the complicated process of a soldier trying to right a wrong and, in the process, forcing change on a town that is not quite ready for it.

Rating: TVG

FOR DISCUSSION

- Why did the Johnsons believe that Dwight should be buried in the cemetery in town? Why did the people in town resent this decision?
- How important was the church and sacred music in helping the Johnson family cope with their loss? What other sources gave them the strength to force people in town to change? Which characters in this drama helped the family make changes in the town?
- Why were the men who served with LT Johnson so secretive? Whom were they protecting and why?
- Why was the last letter Dwight sent home important to this story? How did the soldiers honor their dead commander in the end? Why did Major Laird pursue the truth about Johnson's death when it would have been easier to ignore the situation?
- Did Johnson's family do the right thing by forcing change? Support your answer.

RESOURCES

Ashabranner, Brent. Their Names to Live: What the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Means to Americans. Brookfield, CT: Twenty-First Century Books, 1998.

Pederson, Jay. Black Firsts: 2000 Years of Extraordinary Achievement. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 1994.

Taylor, Mildred. Roll of Thunder: Hear My Cry. New York: Puffin Books, 1997.

Professional Development

One way for teachers to help reduce prejudice and to counter the persistence of racial, religious, and ethnic discrimination is to help students think critically and analytically. The aim of diversity awareness is to develop more tolerant and understanding individuals. These people act both on their own and with others to reduce and even to reject various forms of prejudice. Two Odyssey Network programs offer background information for teachers as well as diversity awareness programs. Use these programs to increase students' understanding about the diverse religions and individual cultures represented in many school districts.

Religions of the World

"African and African-American Religion"
Airdate: February 20, 2000, 4 p.m. and 1 a.m., ET/PT

This collection of insightful programs explores differences and similarities among major world religions. Learn how followers of particular religions perceive the world to gain a better understanding of others and ourselves. Videotapes of these programs are available from the Library Video Company at 1-800-843-3620 or from the online store at www.odysseychannel.com.

Landmarks of Faith

"Heritage of African-American Worship"
Airdate: February 27, 2000, 4 p.m. and 1 a.m., ET/PT

This series explores America's rich tapestry of religious beliefs by visiting places where those faiths took root and grew. Host Schuyler Sackett travels to churches, synagogues, cathedrals, and meeting sites to study how each has made a significant contribution to our past. This is a "Cable in the Classroom" program offered to educators commercial-free, to tape and replay. Videotapes of this series are available anywhere that videos are sold or from the online store at www.odysseychannel.com. Study guides are available online.

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more Black History resources

BOOKS

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Selected Bibliography of Children's Books is a resource of 500 reviews of multicultural literature appropriate for grades K-6. To request the bibliography, contact the Anti-Defamation League Materials Library at 1-800-343-5540, or visit the ADL web site at www. adl.org. The following books are available from the ADL Materials Library:

Coleman, Evelyn. *White Socks Only*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman and Co., 1996. An illustrated book about a young African-American girl and her experiences in Mississippi during segregation. Fiction.

Birdseye, Debbie H., and Tom Birdseye. *Under Our Skin: Kids Talk About Race*. New York: Holiday House, 1997. Children of different ethnic backgrounds talk about their perspectives on prejudice, bigotry, and the role their ethnicity plays in their lives. Non-fiction.

on the World Wide Web

Black History Past to Present: An Internet-Based Treasure Hunt on African Americans is at www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/BHM/hunt.html.

Association for the Study of African-American Life and History is at www.artnoir.com/asalh/mission.html. This association offers educational kits for Black History Month. Fax your request for ordering information to (301) 587-5915, or e-mail it to asalh@earthlink.net.

Public television station, WGBH, has a companion web site to its series *Africans in America: America's Journey Through Slavery* which includes a teacher's guide, a youth activity guide, and a resource bank. The site is at www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html.

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History has a web site with links to slavery bibliographies and slave narratives. Visit them at www.vi.uh.edu/pages/mintz/gilder.html.

"Our Shared History: Celebrating African American History and Culture With the National Park Services," including links to "Teaching With Historic Places: Lesson Plan List for African American History," is at www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/topic.htm#african.

A site devoted to African-American writers from the Social Studies School Service, which includes links to literature curriculum kits, is at www.socialstudies.com/c/@5Bskb5ZWBrbul/Pages/article.html?article@aawriters.

"The African-American Mosaic: A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Black History and Culture" is at www.lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html.

Print and broadcast media also have valuable sites to explore. Try the *Christian Science Monitor* at www.csmonitor.com/atcsmonitor/specials/bhmonth/links/p-resource.html, the *Seattle Times* at www.seattletimes.com/mlk, or CNN at www.cnn.com/EVENTS/black_history/ index.html.

"The Underground Railroad Interactive Site" from *National Geographic* magazine, including a rich array of links, is at www.nationalgeographic.com/features/99/railroad/.

A web site and informative links compiled by elementary school experts on the Underground Railroad is at www2.lhric.org/pocantico/ tubman/links.htm.

The Menare Foundation offers documentation, preservation, and restoration research related to Underground Railroad safe houses. Visit www.ugrr.org/.

Visit the Underground Railroad site at the University of California at Berkeley at www.education.ucdavis.edu/NEW/STC/lesson/socstud/railroad/title.htm.

OFF-AIR TAPING GUIDELINES AND VIDEO AVAILABILITY

Educators may videotape these programs for educational purposes only. Recordings may be retained for two years. Videos are available anywhere that videotapes are sold or from the online store at www.odysseychannel.com.

credits

This guide was written by June Behrmann, M.Ed., and was produced for Odyssey, a Hallmark and Henson Network, by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, DC. Consult the KIDSNET monthly *Media Guide* for information about other educational programming for children in preschool through high school. The KIDSNET web site contains *Media Guide* listings, media alerts and other information about educational programming.

The "Odyssey Black History Month 2000" *Guide for Educators* may be downloaded from the official Odyssey Network web site, at www.odysseychannel.com. This guide will be permanently archived at www.kidsnet.org.

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